


Career Corner

How To Survive In An Economic Ice Age

By Wendy Lalli



Anyone over the age of thirty who has been job-hunting recently will tell you it's a much colder world out there than it was just two years ago. Statistically, it takes almost twice as long to find a new job as it used to in almost every industry. For those who have been downsized, being unemployed isn't just challenging, it can be terrifying. Yet, the truth is, job-hunting per se isn't that much different than it's been during previous recessions. What is different is the way we now work at jobs once we find them.

Just consider - our official workdays are not only longer than they used to be, our private hours are invaded by work-related calls and e-mails. Whatever our profession, we all face the prospect of changing jobs frequently, whether we want to or not. And giving loyalty to, or expecting it from a company has become a very dangerous proposition in this volatile economic climate.

For example, Therese H., a Marketing Director with a major corporation was recently downsized after 25 years with the company. She was a legend at the firm, having worked her way up from a support role in Corporate Communications to the head of the Marketing Department. After Therese was promoted to Director, the person who took her old spot not only wrote copy, supervised freelancers and dealt with printers and other vendors as Therese had, they also developed internal and external Web sites, designed layouts and placed stories in the trade media. Of course, as Director, Therese oversaw all of these activities but she wasn't really involved in the day-to-day details.

Later, when her department was eliminated due to a corporate merger, Therese found herself losing jobs to younger candidates who, in her previous role, might have reported to her.

While this may seem to be a case of age discrimination, it's actually because these junior managers were more qualified than Therese. After all, they've had hands-on experience in areas that she had never really dealt with before or after her promotion.

What can Therese do at this point? She can try to fill the gaps in her experience by upgrading her computer and design skills, get some experience writing for the Internet and develop as wide a network of contacts as possible to try to connect with a new position. Then, once she lands her next job, she should make a point of being a more active participant in all of the department's projects while maintaining and expanding her professional network.

Another candidate, Denise D., is facing a different problem that is typical of many young professionals: Well-educated and highly competent, Denise D. is a Generation-Xer who worked for an in-house PR department. When the company moved its corporate headquarters to another city Denise's job was eliminated.

Like Therese, she knows that networking should be a key component of her job hunt. But although her previous job involved building a communications network for the corporation, she never really worked on developing a professional one for herself. Now she's finding it hard to contact people for assistance when she's had little or no personal relationship with them in the past. The fact is, building a strong network is easier when you're in a position to help others first. Then, when the tables are turned, those they've assisted in the past are ready and willing to return the favor.

So remember the lessons learned by Therese and Denise. In today's survivalist economy you have to constantly upgrade your skills and keep in touch

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